



*Church in the Wildwood*





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DUANE FEATHERSTONHAUGH



# Church in the Wildwood

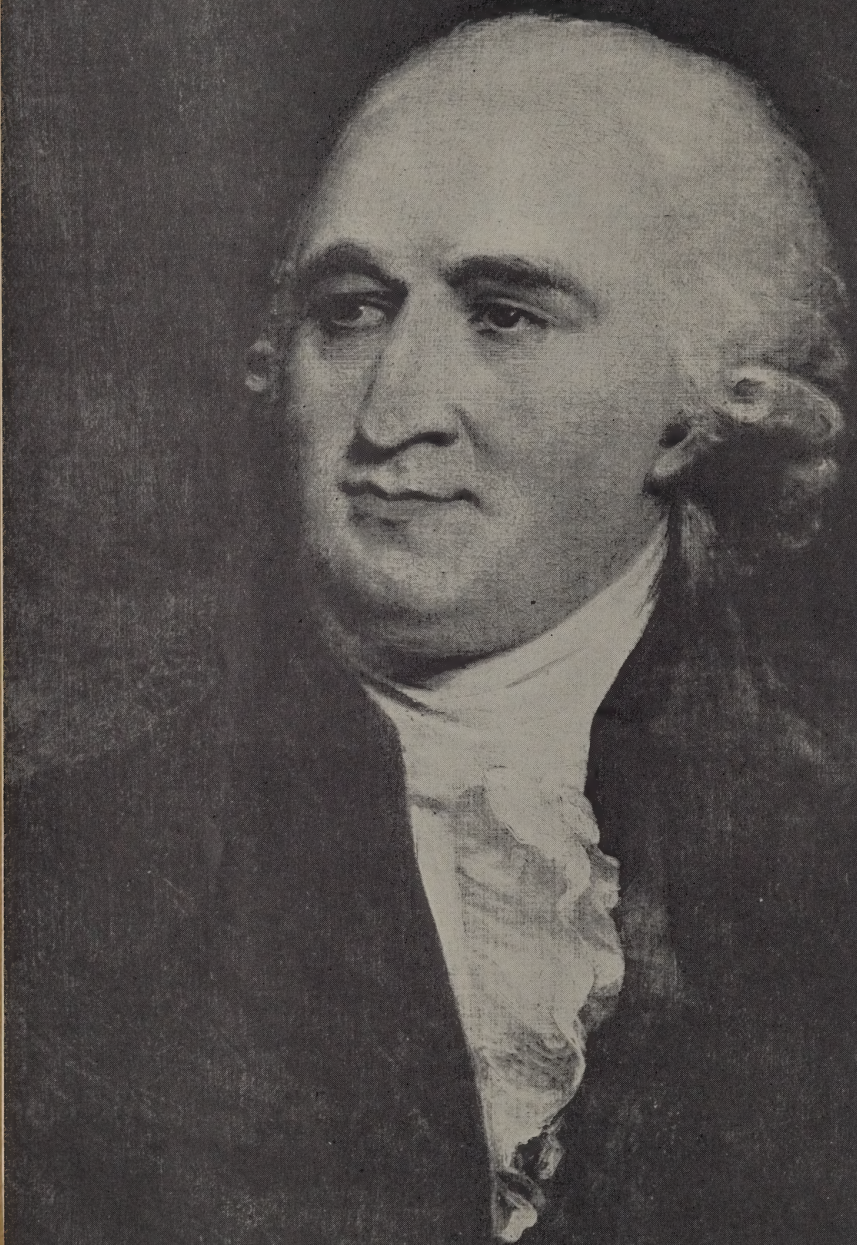
A HISTORY  
OF CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
IN DUANESBURG  
SCHENECTADY COUNTY  
NEW YORK

By

DUANE FEATHERSTONHAUGH

(President, Schenectady County Historical Society, and a  
great-great-great grandson of James Duane,  
founder of Christ Church.)







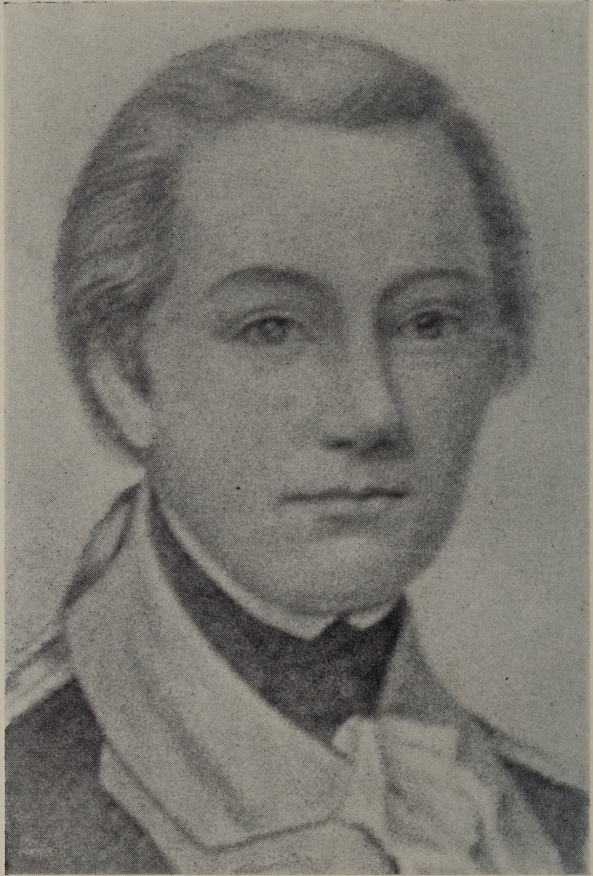
THE QUIET OF THE  
August morning was glorified by the melody  
of the tolling bell.

But the bell was hardly needed for already most of the residents of Duanesburg were on their way to attend the consecration of Christ Episcopal Church. Wagons bumped harshly over the baked ruts of the single track road leading up the hill to the church while small clouds of dust spread away from the wheels and then, as though tired by the summer sun, settled slowly to the ground.

Moses Gage and Derick Miller stood in front of the building greeting their friends. Like everyone else, they were waiting to see the arrival of James Duane, General William North and the other prominent men who were expected to attend the ceremony.

The Right Reverend Samuel Provoost, bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of New York, and his assistant, the Reverend Thomas Ellison, rector of St. Peter's Church, Albany, were already in the church. With them was the Reverend Leonard Cutting.

JAMES DUANE,  
*Founder of Christ Episcopal Church.*



GENERAL WILLIAM NORTH



Outside, those who within a few minutes were to form the new congregation continued to wait for the arrival of Judge Duane.

"They tell me Judge Duane intends this as the center of the village square," William Young said to his neighbor, John Wright.

"That's right. It ought to be a mighty nice place when it's finished."

"I can still remember the time we cleared the spot for this church. Remember the rum and mutton Judge Duane gave everyone?"

"I'll say I do. Let's see— that was along in the fall of 1787, wasn't it?"

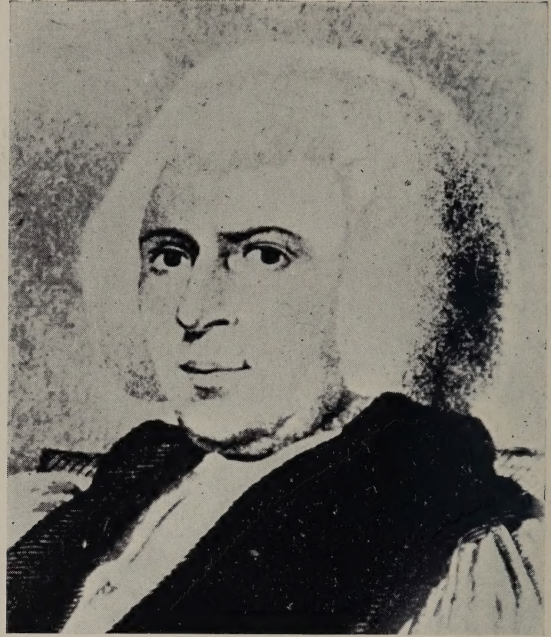
"That's right. The first two weeks in October."

Further conversation was cut short by the arrival of another group of neighbors. There was Job Briggs and his family and the Kysers, Borlands, Kniskerns, Cullings, Herricks and Van Antwerps.

A child's voice sounded above the confusion of the general discussion.

"Here they come, mother. Look!"

The neighbors turned to watch the two coaches sway over the rough road. They step-



THE RIGHT REVEREND SAMUEL PROVOOST,  
*First Bishop of New York*



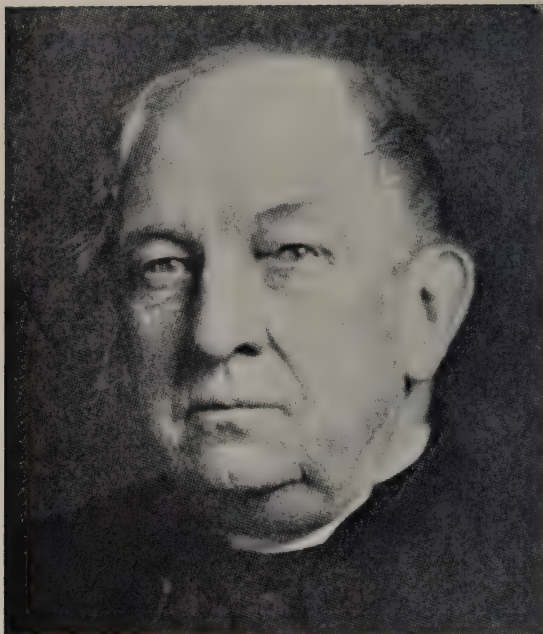
ped back politely as Judge and Mrs. Duane stepped from the carriage. With them were General and Mrs. William North, Miss Catherine Duane, Baron Von Steuben and General William Popham.

The Reverend Cutting opened the door to the church and Judge Duane and his party entered. Then the door was closed and the congregation advised that the ceremony would begin in a few minutes.

Duane and his party went directly to the Duane pew in the front of the church and knelt in silent prayer. Then Duane arose and handed a document to Bishop Provoost who was seated on the chancel.

The bishop arose and in the presence of the small group of men and women who had done so much to mould America into a united nation he read Duane's message.

*I, James Duane, proprietor of the town of Duanesburgh, in the county of Albany, to all to whom it may concern, do hereby make known and declare that the edifice by me lately erected at the place in the center square of the said town, and the ground on which this said edifice*



THE RIGHT REVEREND  
WILLIAM CROSWELL DOANE, D.D.  
*First Bishop of the Albany Diocese, 1869-1913*



*is situated, and intended and hereby appropriated for the public worship of Almighty God, according to the rites and ceremonies of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York, for which use they will always remain and continue. And that I have requested and do hereby pray, the Right Reverend, the Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in said State of New York to consecrate and set apart the said edifice with the ground on which it is erected, the name of Christ's church in Duanesburgh, according to the rites and ceremonies of the said Protestant Episcopal church.*

*In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal the twenty-fourth day of August in the year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Three.*

Immediately after reading Duane's message the doors of the church were thrown open and the congregation entered. As the residents of the town took their places, Duane pulled the curtain that shielded his pew from the congregation.

"I feel that the congregation should pay full attention to the services and not be distracted



THE RIGHT REVEREND  
RICHARD HENRY NELSON, D.D.  
*Bishop of Albany, 1913-1929*

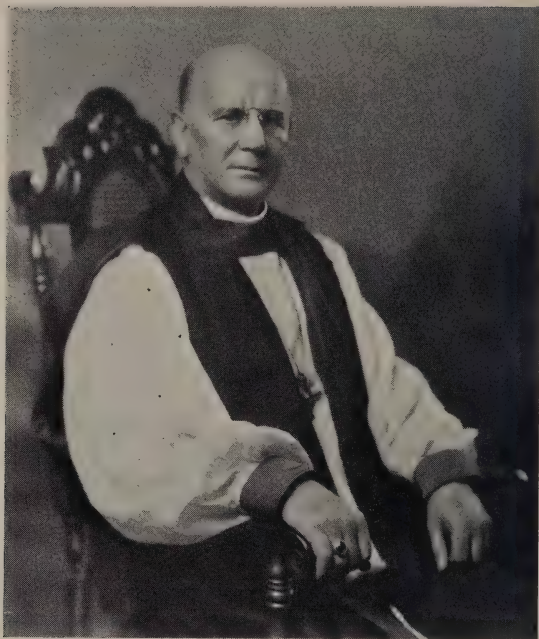


by anyone who may be sitting in this pew," he explained to General Popham.

Bishop Provoost then read Duane's message to the 300 friends and neighbors who crowded into the church and the consecration ceremony was underway.

Thus, on August 24th, 1793, began the history of Christ Episcopal Church, a place of worship given by Duane to his friends and neighbors in Duanesburg.

But, if the village of Cong in County Galway, Ireland, had not been a dull and unexciting place for an ambitious young man Christ Church might never have existed. Anthony Duane was born in Cong in 1682. There was little to attract him there so he enlisted in the British navy at 18. His naval career lasted until 1713 when, as purser and junior officer of the man-of-war Seaford, he stopped at the harbor of New York, then a town of some 6,000 inhabitants. There he met Eva Benson, daughter of a wealthy merchant. He made several trips back to England to settle his affairs in that country and to arrange for his retirement from the navy and in 1717 Eva Benson and Anthony



THE RIGHT REVEREND  
G. ASHTON OLDHAM, D.D.  
*Bishop of Albany since 1929*



Duane were married. Duane soon became a prosperous merchant. He also had opportunity to meet the Livingstons and other prominent families and from them acquired an interest in land speculation which led to his acquiring some 6,000 acres of wild land in the hills southwest of Schenectady. In the manner of the day, this holding was named Duane's Bush.

Eva Benson died in 1729. The following year, Anthony Duane married again. This time his bride was Althea Ketteltas, daughter of a wealthy business man. He had had two sons by his first wife, Anthony, Jr., 1720-43, and Richard, 1721-41. Althea bore him five more, Abraham, 1731; Abraham, 1732-67; James, 1733-97; John, 1734-56, and Cornelius, 1736-81. It was James, who was born on February 6, 1733, who became the American statesman and who developed the family holdings at Duanesburg, primarily with the idea of founding a city that would be the metropolis of northern New York.

Anthony Duane's second marriage lasted only until March 12, 1736, when his wife died shortly after the birth of Cornelius. He waited



INTERIOR OF  
CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH



five years, then married Grietje Riker, the widow of Thomas Lynch. The third Mrs. Duane grew to be a great favorite with her step-sons.

The turning point in the life of young James Duane came when his father died in 1747 and he was sent to live with Col. Robert Livingston, proprietor of the great Livingston Manor on the Hudson. Here, no doubt, the daily contemplation of Livingston's vast holdings and numerous tenantry instilled into the mind of the youthful Duane the thought of similar possessions for himself. His subsequent marriage to Col. Livingston's daughter, Maria, in 1759 served further to strengthen this desire.

Meantime, Duane had selected law as his life work and had entered the office of James Alexander, one of the most eminent counselors of the colonial bar. After serving the required clerkship of seven years, Duane quickly built an extensive and profitable practice.

As Duane began to grow wealthy he acquired, by purchase and inheritance, the original 6,000 acres of land that his father had held. He added to them until he was the owner

of 50,000 acres of wilderness, or what is now almost the entire Town of Duanesburg.

About the year 1760 Duane made an attempt to settle portions of the land with natives of New York State but agents of Sir William Johnson, who was also trying to settle his own holdings, circulated unfavorable reports about Duanesburg and the attempt failed. In May, 1764, Duane entered into an agreement with 19 Germans from Frankfort, Pa., and one from New York City. These families were to be provided by Duane with a town lot and farm. They were to make actual entry within one year and were to pay the proprietor 55 pounds a year for the first 10 years of residence. After that period they were to pay to Duane on the first day of January each year one pair of fat hens for each lot and farm and during the year were required to give one day's labor with a team. The contract embodied a scheme for the erection of these lands into a town and the election of town officers by the residents. The settlement was carried out, although only 11 of the families actually came to Duanesburg, and in turn Duane secured designation of the lands as a township.



The hardships encountered by the original settlers were many but they stuck to their part of the bargain and today many of the residents of the community still bear the names of those 11 German families.

For the next six years Duane worked faithfully to develop his holdings. Then the approach of trouble with England caused him to interrupt that work and start on a career of service to his nation. He was elected a delegate to the first General Congress of 1774. He served in each succeeding Congress until the establishment of peace. It was then his intention to live permanently in Duanesburg and to develop the town but influential citizens of New York urged him to accept an appointment as the first mayor of that city under the constitution. He served there from 1784 to 1789 when Washington named him judge of the United States District Court.

Duane still had time to visit Duanesburg each summer and he looked forward to the day he could retire to the country and build a home there. He also began to see a need for improvement in the religious atmosphere of the town and made arrangements for services to be

held there from time to time until he could build a church.

There is some doubt that the church services were always a success, at least from the point of view of Duane and the visiting clergy from Schenectady, Albany and other surrounding communities. General William North, Duane's son-in-law who in 1784 had built a mansion on a high ridge near the south border of the town, aided in organizing these services but after one in 1788 wrote to a friend, Colonel Benjamin Walker:

*Tired of the Vanity of this world I am looking out for a better. Heard there was a man in Schenectady who could tell me of a good one, so I sent for him, cleared out the barn, got up seats and sent all around the country inviting people to come and hear. Collected about 100. The service went on very well until they began to sing. The psalm was set so high, that people strained hard and broke the benches in the very act of straining. My hogs, possessed by the Devil as aforetime, broke from their confinement at the crash, came into the barn and made a second disturbance. The minister's horse*



*broke loose from the stable. His master broke short off and told his mirmydons to take up the collection. He did not tell us clearly how to get to the good world he spoke of, so he is to come again.*

Duane, always a religious man and a vestryman and active member of Trinity Church in New York, had long known the town needed a church and in 1787 provided rum for the preparation of a church plot. The site he selected was to be the center square of the city he was certain would grow on his wilderness lands.

Early in 1791 he collected 50 pounds from New York City friends to be used toward the construction of a church at Duanesburg. This sum was inadequate, however, so he finally used it to buy a silver communion service. He then engaged Jeremiah Purdy and paid him 800 pounds to build the church. It was finished during the summer of 1793 and plans were made for the consecration.

The church is the oldest Episcopal edifice in the state which has escaped the hands of the iconoclast and which stands today in all the quaint simplicity of its original structure. It is

modelled after the old Lutheran Church which a century and a half ago stood at the intersection of State and Pearl streets in Albany. It is a plain, two-story farm structure painted white, with square windows and small panes of glass protected by green shutters. A spire at the eastern end of the building is the only thing that distinguishes it as a church.

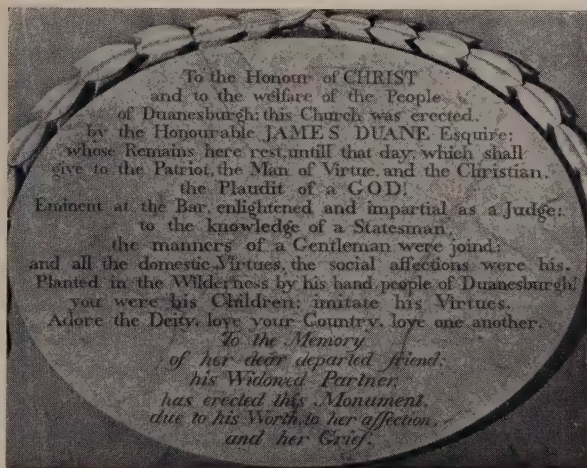
The same simplicity marks the interior. The pews are of plain pine with high straight backs and doors. The chancel is opposite the entrance, the reading desk and place for the clerk, the lofty pulpit reached by winding stairs, being surmounted by a sounding board. The large square pew near the chancel, once surrounded by curtains, remains in the Duane family to this day.

On the walls of the church are mural tablets to the memory of the Duanes and the Norths. Beneath the church is the vault, now cemented for more than a century, in which repose the remains of Judge Duane; his wife, Maria Livingston Duane; General North and his wife, Mary Duane North; Catherine Livingston Duane, another daughter of Judge and Mrs. Duane; Mary North, maiden daughter of Gen-

eral and Mrs. North, and Sarah Duane Featherstonhaugh, wife of George William Featherstonhaugh, and their two children, Ann and Georgianna.

The year following the consecration of the church, Duane retired from public life and came to Duanesburg where he intended to build a mansion and pass his remaining years. The mansion, started in 1794, was to stand in the center of his vast holdings and only a short distance from the church. Only the cellar walls were completed for on February 1, 1797, his long labors came suddenly to a close.

A short time after Duane's death, his widow had the following tablet placed on the walls of the church:





Duane's family continued their connection with the town and the church. General North, who had served under Washington at Valley Forge and at the surrender of Cornwallis, continued to live in his mansion until his death in 1836, serving as speaker of the New York State Assembly, inspector general of the United States Army and in Congress.

Another son-in-law, George William Featherstonhaugh, built a large mansion at Mariaville, where Duane had dammed a stream to form Mariaville Pond, and founded the first experimental agricultural farm in this country. He also founded the Mohawk and Hudson Railroad and the United States Geodetic Survey. His mansion burned in 1829 and after some years of federal service Featherstonhaugh returned to England where he was appointed one of the British commissioners to settle the international boundary dispute between Maine and New Brunswick. Later he was named to the British diplomatic service and in 1848 engineered the escape of Louis Phillippe from the revolutionists.

A daughter, Catherine Duane, built in 1812 the old Duane Mansion which now stands a

short distance from the present Duanesburg crossroads. The mansion is occupied by the writer and his family and contains many of the original furnishings from the Duane home.

For the first year following its consecration, Christ Church was serviced by visiting ministers from Schenectady and Albany. Then, in 1795, the Reverend David Belden, A.M., was appointed the first rector. William North and James C. Duane, Judge Duane's son, were named wardens. Trinity Church of New York contributed 100 prayer books and 300 pounds toward a parsonage. Duane had already set aside a glebe of 800 acres and agreed to provide all glass, nails and paint for the house. The rectory stands a short distance from the church but is not occupied by the rector at the present time.

Although Christ Church parish had been admitted to the Convention of the Diocese of New York as early as 1789, four years before the edifice was erected, it was not until 1795 that steps were taken for its incorporation by the state legislature. The petition was signed by the Reverend Belden, James Duane, General North, James C. Duane, E. Cumpston and Joel Thomson.

The Reverend Belden accepted a call to another church in 1797 and during the winter of 1797-98 the church was again served by visiting clergy. The following summer the Reverend R. G. Wetmore of Schenectady was named rector. He served until his death in 1801.

A number of clergy, including N. Lilly, the Reverend Burtess, R. Hubbard, Dr. Mansfield, Gross Stebbins and F. Clowes, served the needs of the parish during the next 18 years but of these only the Reverend Hubbard was ever named rector. Unfortunately, there is no record of his length of service. The Reverend Nathaniel F. Bruce was called as minister in June, 1818. He was advanced to the priesthood the following year and, on his accepting another call, was succeeded by the Reverend Charles W. Hamilton.

Other early clergy included the Reverend Richard Bury, 1823-1827; the Reverend William B. Thomas, 1828-1841; the Reverend Kendrick Metcalf, 1842-1850, and the Reverend William O. Jarvis, 1851-1859.

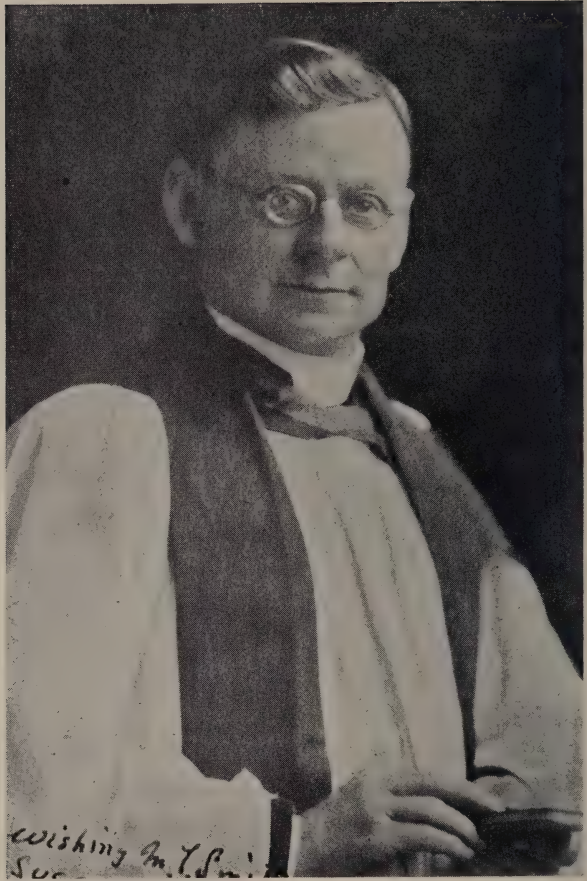
In 1860, the Reverend Robert Trail Spence Lowell, D.D., a brother of James Russell Lowell, was elected rector.



Dr. Lowell's kindness and Christian spirit and his high abilities spread the fame of the little parish throughout the east and many important improvements to parish property were undertaken during his ministry. He also was well known as a poet and author and during his stay at Duaneburg wrote several books, most of them centering about Schenectady.

An incident which affected the community deeply during Dr. Lowell's residence was the death of his eldest daughter. The Lowell family was coming to church in a horse and wagon when the animal bolted, throwing the occupants of the wagon to the ground. The little girl was killed instantly. She is buried in the little churchyard outside the church.

Dr. Lowell sought to resign in 1866 but the congregation, through the vestry, persuaded him to withdraw his resignation. He remained until Easter Sunday, 1869. The Reverend George L. Neide succeeded him and assumed the rectorship in October of the same year. He remained until 1881 and was followed by the Reverend H. L. Zeller, 1881-1883; the Reverend Ernest A. Hartmann, 1884-1889; the



THE REVEREND EDWARD DIAMOND,  
*Present Rector of Christ Episcopal Church*

Reverend Edward W. Flower, 1889-1901; the Reverend Alfred Clare Wilson, 1901-1908; the Reverend Samuel Robert MacEwan, 1908-1912; the Reverend David Bennett Patterson, 1912-1927.

Following the death of the Reverend Patterson in 1927 the parish was without a minister until February 1, 1931, when the Reverend DeVere LaVerne Shelmandine was elected rector. During the intervening period, the parish was serviced by visiting and lay readers.

Following the resignation of the Reverend Shelmandine in September 1, 1934, the rectors were: the Reverend Frederick H. Belden, S. T. B. January 1, 1937-August 31, 1937; the Reverend Arthur W. Abraham, L. Th., March 1, 1938-1941.

The present rector, the Reverend Edward Diamond, came to Christ Church from St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Schenectady, on December 1, 1941.

The present Rector served in the Diocese of London, England as lay assistant to the Reverend Prebendary Carlile, of St. Paul's Cathedral, St. Mary-At-Hill Parish in Evangelistic



*Rectory of Christ Episcopal Church on the historic glebe a short distance from the church.*



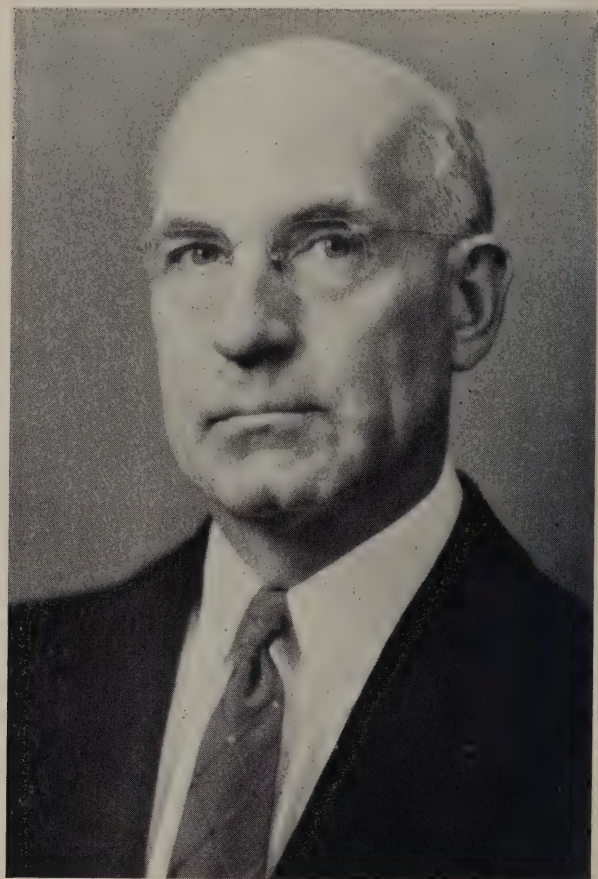
and Social work; volunteered for Canadian Missionary work in the Diocese of Rupertsland; attended St. John's College, and was ordained in St. John's Cathedral Winnipeg, Trinity Sunday 1905; the Diocese of Keewatin, Ontario, as rector of St. James' 1909-1917; Rector of St. Alban's Protestant Cathedral Kenora Ontario 1917-1928; Diocese of Albany, New York, Rector of St. Paul's Schenectady 1928-1941, and is now the rector of Christ Church Duaneburg.

During the 1870's and 80's, the church expanded to take care of other communities. Trinity Chapel was established near Esperance

in 1877 on land given by Benjamin M. Duane. A mission was established in Schoharie in 1884 and two years later one was organized at Middleburg. These missions now are in the Convocation of the Susquehanna.

If the Duane family had the good of the community in mind in establishing the church they also had the foresight to try and insure its continued existence. An endowment fund was established in a New York bank and to this day it helps support the rector and the upkeep of the property.

James Duane's religion, curiously, left him the one material monument to his greatness. But a few stones mark the foundation of his mansion, his houses in Schenectady and New York City have long since been torn down. Only Christ Church remains, a silent sentinel of bygone days where adoration of the Maker mingles with respectful memories of Duane, North, Popham and the other men who had the courage to carve from the wilderness a country where people might be free to live as they choose and to worship in the church of their choice.



ALBERT LIVINGSTON BOUCK,  
*Lay reader at St. Peter's, Delanson, since 1939*



## *St. Peter's Mission*

St. Peter's Church was built about 1875 in the Village of Esperance by Mrs. Fanny Marsh Duane and friends of the church. Many years later it was rebuilt in the village of Delanson, near the High School. The laymen in charge of the church today are Mr. Albert Livingston Bouck. Mr. David Beresford, Mr. Galen White and Mr. William H. Lynes. The clergymen responsible for the church in early days were, the Reverend Ernest A. Flower, the Reverend George L. Neide, the Reverend Samuel R. McEwan, and the Reverend David B. Patterson. The Reverend Edward Diamond is the present rector.

## *The Woman's Auxiliary*

The Christ Church branch of the Woman's Auxiliary was organized on November 6th, 1894.

The first president was the Reverend Ernest W. Flower, Rector of the parish.

The first Vice-president was Mrs. George Matthews.

First Secretary, Mrs. John Jarvis.

First Treasurer, Mrs. Eliza McDougall.

The first box of clothing was sent to the Reverend Arthur Chard, Rector of Waterville in the State of Minnesota.

The officers for 1943 are:

President, Mrs. Romeyn Schrade

Vice-President, Mrs. Abram Ball

Secretary, Mrs. Alva Shafer

Treasurer, Mrs. Ralph W. McDougall

Mrs. Hettie McDougall, Mission box secretary

Mrs. Anna Kelly, Thank offering box secretary

The village of Delanson is represented by Mrs. Dimont Rector and Mrs. Coca White.

The village of Quaker Street is represented by Mrs. Charles Parker.

## *Our Clergymen*

Clergy who have been Rectors or have taken services during the interim of calling Rectors to the Parish.

THE REVEREND DAVID BELDEN  
THE REVEREND ROBERT G. WETMORE  
THE REVEREND N. NILLY  
THE REVEREND BURTESS  
THE REVEREND R. HUBBARD  
THE REVEREND DR. MANSFIELD  
THE REVEREND GROSS STEBBINS  
THE REVEREND S. CLOWES  
THE REVEREND NATHANIEL BRUCE  
THE REVEREND CHARLES F. HAMILTON  
THE REVEREND RICHARD BURY  
THE REVEREND WILLIAM B. THOMAS  
THE REVEREND KENDRICK METCALF  
THE REVEREND WILLIAM O. JARVIS  
THE REVEREND WILLIAM C. KNIGHT  
THE REVEREND ROBERT T. S. LOWELL, D.D.  
THE REVEREND GEORGE L. NEIDE  
THE REVEREND H. L. ZELLER  
THE REVEREND ERNEST A. HARTMAN  
THE REVEREND EDWARD W. FLOWER  
THE REVEREND ALFRED C. WILSON  
THE REVEREND SAMUEL R. McEWAN  
THE REVEREND DAVID B. PATTERSON  
THE REVEREND DeVERE L. SHELMANDINE  
THE REVEREND FREDERICK H. BELDEN  
THE REVEREND ARTHUR W. ABRAHAM  
THE REVEREND EDWARD DIAMOND





#### THE VESTRY

*Front*, the Reverend Diamond, rector, and Donald Henry Shafer, altar boy. *Standing, left to right*, John D. Wright, Elmer Looman, William H. Lynes, Merle H. Dunn, Russel C. Mott, Ralph W. McDougall, warden and treasurer; Galen White, John Mudge, warden, and Hugh McDougall.

## *The Vestry*

The present vestry of Christ Church

1943

Wardens:

John Mudge

Ralph W. McDougall

Vestry Clerk:

W. H. Lynes

Vestry Men:

John D. Wright

Elmer C. Looman

Merle H. Dunn

Russel C. Mott

Galen White

Hugh McDougall

Ralph W. McDougall, Treasurer

Donald Henry Shafer, Altar Boy

GAZETTE PRESS



